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ABSTRACT

School-based substance abuse prevention strategies are presented in this guidebook that stresses nonclassroom programs. It includes information on the importance of expanding school-based prevention plans, an overview of goal and implementation strategies, and a description of specific prevention strategies. These stages include awareness and information campaigns, afterschool programs, peer helper programs, teen conferences and institutions, support groups, performing arts groups, role model and mentor programs, substance-free student events, prevention clubs, service projects, and environmental change projects. The school's expanded role involves helping students to develop personal and social competencies, initiating change in norms that support substance use, and promoting change through student and community channels. (12 references) (LMI)

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Western Regional Center
DRUG -FREE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

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A GUIDE TO EXPANDING SCHOOL-BASED PREVENTION

October 1989

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Special thanks are due to the school-based prevention specialists who contributed ideas and strategies, and also to Julie Scott, student intern at SWRL, for lending her perspective.

In bringing together this collection of prevention strategies the Western Center extends a special acknowledgement to the many, many people, known and unknown, who have contributed over the years to the war against drugs --people whose original work has been adopted and adapted (or visa-versa), and through its use in the public domain has again become the basis for additional materials. We have made every effort to include accurate reference and source information, but even where no such information is available, be assured that the contributions of unnamed people and recycled ideas are just as highly valued.

This guide is an ever evolving document designed to help the practitioner. It is continually being updated with specific examples of prevention strategies and activities that are reflective of particular schools, communities, or contexts.

Note: Several specific strategies or activities for alcohol and other drug prevention are discussed in this guide. They are mentioned as examples and are not to be considered inclusive, nor are they to be considered as recommendations of either the Western Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities or the U.S. Department of Education.

Judith A. Johnson, Director
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A GUIDE TO EXPANDING SCHOOL-BASED PREVENTION

Introduction

When we think of school prevention, we often think only of classroom and curricular programs. While the classroom is an extremely important place for prevention activities, using this format alone will limit effectiveness. There are two formats for prevention strategies in schools: 1. classroom programs that teach students about alcohol, drug, and life skills and 2. nonclassroom programs that are designed and initiated by schools and provided on school campuses. Expanding school-based programs can complement curriculum to broaden and strengthen the school efforts to impact student behavior.

The purpose of this guide is to provide some concrete examples of nonclassroom school-based prevention strategies. A discussion the strategies includes how they are beneficial, how they can be implemented, some problems which may be encountered, and how these problems can be avoided.

The Importance of Expanding School-Based Prevention Strategies

It is important for the school to consider expanding school-based prevention beyond the classroom level for several reasons.

1. *Students need more opportunities to bridge the gap between knowledge acquired in the classroom and daily decision-making*. In the classroom, students are taught that it is important to have high self-esteem, to weigh alternatives when making decisions, and to use assertive communication skills. Students also learn that cooperation is preferable to competition, that consensus building in relationships and families is preferable to authoritarian styles of communication, and that every situation has choices. However, to know that there are always choices is far different from being able to actualize one's own choices. It takes experience to see choices, and it often takes other people to help sort through them. Neither reading about it nor wishing for it gives a person a skill. Skills are acquired through practice. One has to have interaction in order to develop skills for dealing with self, others and social situations.

   While teachers routinely include practice in their lessons, they are still limited by time schedules and the classroom setting. Appropriately designed nonclassroom strategies basically provide apprenticeships in life skills - much like apprenticeships in vocational skill development. Strategies can provide group interaction experiences on the school campus and in the community where making decisions and experiencing the consequences of decisions are a part of the process. Students can test their social

competencies, develop self-esteem, increase personal control, clarify personal values, practice life skills, acquire experiences for decision making and meet personal needs.

2. *The collective influences of parents, peers, the community, and the society are stronger than those of the classroom.* The classroom can't overcome all these counterinfluences. If the classroom is the only place on the school campus where anti-drug and alcohol messages are heard, the impact will be small. One of the strengths of designing other school-based strategies is to extend the consistency of prevention messages throughout the school campus and into the wider community.

3. *Peer-group interactions are the most important part of a young person's life, particularly from around the fourth grade.* Classroom programs are most frequently teacher directed through lecture, media presentations, projects, group discussions, role-plays, and cooperative learning. Recent research is indicating that to increase the likelihood of success for prevention strategies, two shifts need to occur. First, adults must be placed more in the role of facilitator rather than controller. Second, a maximum amount of effort should be directed to building programs that utilize peer group interactions, positive peer pressure, and peer influence. These shifts require that students be treated as colleagues in prevention rather than targets for prevention services or targets for change. The more students are involved in program design and implementation, the more they will become empowered to create changes in their social norms and counter the feelings of alienation and separateness that are common to adolescence. Expanding strategies can be almost completely focused around peer-directed small group activities.

4. *Creatively designed nonclassroom strategies have potential to reach students who do not respond well to traditional classroom activities or who do not engage in school activities at all.* All students do not learn in the same way. For the most part curricular programs depend on good student language and listening skills. While there is no guarantee that nonclassroom approaches will interest and involve a variety of students, it is clear that limiting prevention efforts to the classroom will eliminate the impact on many students.

5. *The school is becoming a major socialization agent for youth.* Social and economic conditions have changed the way that the family is organized. Throughout the past two decades, the school has been expanding its role gradually, by providing meals, daycare, and in some cases healthcare services to students and families. Occasionally, a student is at the school from before breakfast through to dinner. The school is frequently a safer place for children after school than their own neighborhoods. There is tremendous potential to expand the role the school can play, outside the classroom, in helping kids move from childhood through to maturity, and consequently to impact their use of alcohol and other drugs.

Overview of Strategies: Goals and Implementation Considerations

There are many nonclassroom activities that schools can develop and implement on campus. This guide discusses these and provides examples of each. Only strategies that have a high

capacity for student direction and student involvement are included. Many of the strategies build skills or reinforce factors that are associated with healthy decision-making. Many have been on school campuses for generations, but they have not been specifically used as alcohol and other drug prevention strategies.

- Awareness and Information Campaigns
- After School Programs
- Peer Helper Programs
- Teen Conferences and Institutes
- Support Groups
- Performing Arts Groups
- Role Model and Mentor Programs
- Alcohol and Other Drug-Free Events for Students
- Prevention Clubs
- Service Projects
- Environmental Change Programs

The goals of each are similar and include:

- to encourage healthy life styles
- to change attitudes
- to influence social norms
- to bring attention to the problems of youth alcohol and drug use
- to mobilize the school and the community to meet the needs of students
- to reduce problems associated with drug use.

To ensure that the prevention impact is the strongest, there are important considerations for design and implementation. Strategies should:

- promote positive life styles and healthy personal development
- make maximum use of adult leaders who model healthy life styles
- reinforce the skills learned through health or drug-prevention curricula
- be designed and directed primarily by students using adults as facilitators
- be adaptable for use in a variety of income and cultural/ethnic settings
- forge or strengthen linkages between the school and the community
- involve students who are not traditionally involved in school activities
- mix high-risk and low-risk students in team activities and partnerships requiring interaction
- avoid labeling of students

School-Based Prevention Strategies

Awareness and Information Campaigns

Awareness and information campaigns provide basic information to make people aware of a problem or issue and generate support for community problem solving. The purpose of this strategy is to reach a large number of people with accurate and positive information. It is

unrealistic to expect an awareness campaign - - even a highly effective one - - to change many people's behavior. Messages do, however, reinforce healthy life styles. Such campaigns are especially valuable in neighborhoods where advertising and pro-use messages are promoted heavily.

Awareness campaigns can be sponsored by clubs, student councils, teachers, or community groups. They should:

- Utilize several different media and languages appropriate to the community.
- Choose a person with whom your audience can identify to deliver messages.
- Use information that is accurate, current, and brief.
- Keep messages positive, because scare tactics have consistently been shown to be ineffective.
- Have students from the appropriate age groups design and field test ideas so they have maximum impact on the targeted group.
- Create unifying slogans, themes, colors, and songs.
- Consistently repeat the message over time and avoid one-time messages.
- Enlist the help of experienced media people.

Ideas: Build a campaign around an already established school event such as a Halloween carnival, health fair, contest, race, sporting event, concert, parade or assembly. Use existing home-school or student communications for special issues or columns. Anything that the students use or see is a vehicle for a message. Good examples are bulletin boards, school buses, displays, newsletters, banners, assemblies, bumper stickers, key chains, book covers, book marks, book bags, backpacks, specially designed lunch bags, t-shirts, sweat shirts, lunch tickets, milk cartons, athletic uniforms, provisional driver's permits, or school ID cards. Conduct an annual "walk against drugs," or similar public promotion. Campaigns are limited only by imagination.

After School Programs

The purpose of this strategy is to provide adult-supervised after-school programs designed to meet the needs of the students and families in the surrounding neighborhoods.These can be daycare programs run by the school district or an outside agency, community recreation programs that provide alternative activities, or tutoring programs. They are often directed to latch-key kids. The common theme is that they are located on the school campus. Activities might include education, entertainment, computer instruction, free play, sports, crafts, field trips, hobbies, games, or other activities.

While it is impossible for students to create and control a daycare program, they can nevertheless have substantial impact on the organization and activities of after school programs in general so that the basic concepts of peer group influence and interaction remain a key focus.

Ideas: There are endless ways in which these can be organized to link schools and community, to provide opportunities for cross-age tutors and mentors, to provide

apprenticeship and job training to older students, to serve as a focal point for parent participation, and to connect the school with the community.

There are other types of activities that give students support after school but do not involve a school campus activity. Dial a friend phone hotlines, designated safe homes, and well publicized emergency numbers for kids are examples of such important services.

Peer Helper Programs

Peer programs create opportunities for students to help other students. They build on the knowledge that students turn to each other for information, feedback, support, and role modeling. Peer programs have been shown to be extremely effective in combating adolescent health-risking behaviors. They are among the most promising new approaches in the field. When designing peer programs, it is extremely important to involve all types of students, all ethnic groups, and integrate K-12 approaches.

These programs generally fall into one of the following categories:

1. A peer helper or counselor works one-to-one with a student to listen to them, help them sort out their problems, refer them to resources to meet their needs, and serve as a co-facilitator for discussion or support groups.
2. Peer friends are paired as "buddies" with students, usually at critical transition times such as school transfers or changes from elementary to middle grade schools.
3 Peer educators help other students with their studies and deliver health promotion and/or drug and alcohol prevention lessons to younger students. Peer educators are not necessarily academically gifted, but they are students who have good knowledge and the ability to communicate with others.
4 Peer-group leaders work to organize school and community activities focusing on prevention.

Peer helper programs are ideal for creating culturally sensitive programs. For example, Latino peer helpers can be trained to act as discussion leaders or role models for other Latino youth who are coping with specific conflicts that result from being Latino.

There are many ways of training and selecting peer helpers, but the most important consideration is the student's eventual role in achieving the program goals and objectives. Some schools use a screening and interview process, especially those programs emphasizing one to one listening and referral. Others use an open enrollment system. One strategy is to include large numbers of students into the peer programs to have the greatest impact on the student body. Then, after training, assignments are made on the basis of individual strengths and interests.

Training depends also on the age of the students and the school setting. Most peer training programs include training in communication skills, active listening, question asking, assertiveness, and making appropriate referrals. Some schools offer credit and teach peers in an elective class that meets five days/week. Other schools provide a one-two session/week class before or after school. Another approach is to have intensive seminars or off campus

retreats to train peers. Whatever method is selected, on-going adult supervision is extremely important.

There is sometimes resistance to peer programs, often due to lack of clarification of the goals before starting the programs and the misconception that students will be para-professionals rather than trained friends and listeners.

To reduce the problems with implementation:

- Write a clear purpose and policies and procedures before initiating a program
- Obtain administrative and board approval
- Assemble an advisory board for peer projects
- Emphasize confidentiality
- Develop community involvement. Although the main supervision should come from an on-campus position, community professionals can be used to supplement training
- Link peer services with recreation programs, church youth groups, and other community programs to build connections. There is at least one very successful program in which peer groups have designed and presented family communication skills programs to parents
- Establish a monitoring and supervision system

Ideas: Elementary students can:

- teach language skills to new students
- run drop-in centers for students
- teach refusal skills to other students
- assist as classroom aides
- do cross-age tutoring
- conduct campus tours
- develop plays and sociodramas
- be special friends

Secondary school age peer helpers can, in addition to the above:

- assist in co-facilitating intervention education and support groups
- provide one-to-one listening to other students
- staff teenage hotlines
- plan and run student conferences

Teen Conferences and Institutes

The purpose of teen institutes, retreats, and conferences is to empower teens to take action against the alcohol and other drug problems in their neighborhoods and communities. These conferences are planned, organized, and run by students with adults acting as advisors. The students act as Masters of Ceremonies, workshop presenters and keynote speakers.

Teen conferences and institutes can be held by one school, one district, or a regional coalition of schools. They are usually two to five days long and include workshops and lectures, small group discussions, action planning, and alcohol and other drug free social events.. Most of the

current institutes are for high school age students, but the strategy is very appropriate for middle schools and upper elementary grades.

Support Groups

The purpose of support groups is to help students mobilize their personal and social resources to meet their needs. A group setting can facilitate attempts to help students increase their knowledge about their own behavior patterns or how their lives are being affected by another's behavior. Peers can often work with each other to break down barriers to awareness and to increase each other's ability to receive new information.

There are many types of groups that are currently being offered to students at school. Some are used for preassessment or early intervention services for identified at-risk students and are mandatory or part of a student contract, but most are offered to all students. School groups are for support, not therapy. Examples are: children of alcoholics or concerned persons groups, Alateen, young people's AA, Families in Change groups (for students whose families are undergoing separation or divorce), eating problems groups, self-esteem groups, and school adjustment groups.

Groups are led by adult facilitators who give structure, teach, and direct the content. Co-facilitators may be peers who have received special training. One common way to facilitate support groups is to have a trained staff person work with a community professional.

Performing Arts Groups

Live music or theater groups can be used as a medium to present drug-free and other messages to students. Performing arts groups create atmospheres where students can combine theater, dance, and music to write and act scripts dealing with feelings or life experiences; anger, depression, fear, loneliness, pressure, friendship, dating, divorce, stress, being successful, or whatever is important to the participating students. The students who participate have the potential to make major changes in their lives. Audiences can find performances powerful and moving experiences. Dialogues with the audience generally follow performances.

Performing groups can be for all students who have not been involved with alcohol and other drugs or for students who are recovering. Students who are at risk of failing in traditional classroom environments often have few alternative ways to learn or express themselves. It is important to involve students who are usually not involved in school activities. Most of the current groups are junior high school or older. This concept, however, is applicable to all levels.

It is a excellent strategy for mixing cultural groups and for developing links between divergent backgrounds. Students take the leadership in this strategy, from outreach through to production.

Performing arts programs also can make extensive community connections, through performances, but also through professionals and businesses in the community who lend their expertise and financial support to the costs of the performances.

Ideas: Elementary and secondary groups create programs for school and community, produce videos and commercials, or direct lunch-time school performances. Many do improvisational scenes at the request of the audiences.

Role Model and Mentor Programs

Young people can be provided with community role models by linking them with successful adults who model healthy life styles, such as politicians, public officials, business owners, professionals, police officers, fireman, barbers, machinists, painters, musicians, etc. As assistants, trainees, or observers, students learn how people live drug-free lives and acquire skills, confidence, hope, and focus. A ten year study conducted at the University of Minnesota of children under stress has shown that every resilient child has a protective competent adult, either a parent, teacher, relative or another kind of mentor figure.

These programs can be designed to give students both school credit and income, and are probably most effective in the middle grades and up. As with the peer helper programs, the mentor programs have important applications in all cultural groups and neighborhoods.

Considerations for implementation are:

- Create an advisory board
- Develop a plan with an evaluation component
- Write clear goals and student objectives
- Establish criteria for selecting and screening appropriate role models
- Train role models/mentors prior to placing students with them
- Make regular contacts with role models
- Involve school board members and community officials
- Publicize your program

Alcohol and Other Drug Free-Events For Students

The purpose of this strategy is to sponsor activities that are usually accompanied by alcohol and other drugs, such as graduation or prom night, and conduct them in a drug and alcohol free atmosphere. Graduation night, prom night, concerts, dances, and other events can all be sponsored and highlighted as alcohol and drug-free events. Some schools have formed alliances with the community to create alcohol and other drug-free night clubs for students.

It is essential that students be involved in the design and planning of events. With the exception of grad night and prom night, plan events that are inexpensive, fun, and have adults in low-key roles. A good way to extend resources is to combine events with other area high schools.

Prevention Clubs

The purpose of prevention clubs is to bring together students who are committed to not using alcohol and other drugs. Through a variety of educational, recreational, and service activities, these clubs can strengthen and reinforce a student's determination to lead a drug-free life.

One of the most widely implemented clubs in school districts across the country is the "Just Say No" Club. In some schools the name may be slightly different but the focus is the same. The "just say no" emphasis works best at the elementary school level, and as students increase in age the slogans are often changed to reflect choice, such as "the choice for me, drug free."

Clubs can be offered as after-school activities led by a teacher, parent, counselor, health specialist or other school staff person. Peer leaders from older grade levels can act as co-leaders. Clubs should hold regular meetings, at least twice a month, and select their activities based on their particular school. Organizations or larger businesses in the community frequently sponsor or adopt clubs.

Prevention clubs can be the primary vehicle for a whole range of other prevention activities, including most of the strategies in this guide. To attract and maintain members, clubs should:

- Have activities that are fun and basically designed by the members
- Provide recreational activities where games, sports, crafts, field trips, dances and other activities help members develop outside interests
- Focus on activities where students practice situations with peer pressure and decision making
- Make contributions to the community

Service Projects

This strategy aims to provide students with opportunities to influence their schools and communities and in the process to build their interpersonal skills, self-esteem, and sense of power and control. While service activities may seem to have little relationship to alcohol and drug free events, participation in the development of these activities is being increasing used in recovery programs and in community-based prevention strategies.

Projects can be initiated and designed by the students and in all grades K-12. It is also an area that can link groups across ages, so while a service project is being conducted, cross-age peer role modeling is also achieved. This strategy lends itself to a variety of cultural and ethnic settings, and has limitless options for building links and partnerships with the community. The schools existing clubs, athletic teams, or classes are all possible initiators of projects. Students can connect with other ongoing projects or they can initiate and involve others. After alliances have been forged, there are a variety of ways in which other prevention activities can emerge to meet needs.

To increase success, think short term and visible in the beginning, obtain press and media attention, send a memo to the school board to invite them to participate and to keep them informed, and give students certificates of involvement or letters of appreciation.

Ideas: Service projects can be directed to senior citizens, the homeless, the poor, or the environment. They can be relatively simple and short term such as raising money, collecting food, donating toys, or cleaning up a park or beach. They can be long term and more complex such as developing relationships and ongoing contacts with senior citizens or handicapped kids or meeting a need, such as tutoring. In as much as possible, many Projects funded in the 1970's, called "Channel One," included community restoration, rebuilding community parks and neighborhood recreational areas.

Environmental Change Programs

This strategy is somewhat different from the other strategies because it is designed to change the social and cultural context in which the student lives, not specifically to change the student. The goals of environmental change programs are to 1) change the **way** society promotes alcohol and other drug use through advertising and 2) change the practices and laws that promote use or create health and safety risks. Through the application of this strategy, students acquire skills while at the same time they create change in their neighborhoods. Prevention clubs, peer programs and leadership councils can serve as catalysts and initiators, but this strategy must be done in coalitions with other community groups.

Ideas: There are several examples of activities that students, working with community groups, can initiate. One example is to identify alcohol outlets in the community and specifically in the areas surrounding the schools, and then to work to restrict the outlets through community planning and zoning departments. Other examples are:

- Conduct surveys around schools for billboard messages about tobacco and alcohol, calculate how many students they impact, how many messages one student can receive over a week period encouraging drinking and smoking, then publish the findings and work to change billboard regulations
- Visit city council meetings when a new liquor license is being issued to see what questions are asked and what issued are raised
- Make sure point of sale warning posters and labels are posted

This strategy will only work if there is support and consensus in the community. Before working in this area:

- Collect information to identify the problems in your specific community
- Obtain advice and technical assistance from your local drug and alcohol office
- Remember that this particular strategy can create controversy
- Keep your school board informed
- Publish your findings
- Create an awards/publicity program to give recognition to people in the community who are working to establish healthy environments

- Assemble a coalition

Conclusion

The school has an extremely important role to play in proactive approaches to prevention - creating conditions to help youth develop personal and social competencies. As society depends more on the school to meet many of the basic social as well as academic needs of youth, nonclassroom activities will expand. Schools also can be one of the major factors in initiating change in the norms that support alcohol and other drug use. Until drug and alcohol use is not perceived as normative, youth will have little motivation to resist.

Expanding nonclassroom prevention can mean considerable change and work for a school. However, both studies on the effectiveness of schools and research on prevention strategies support these changes. In the Carnegie Task Force recommendations for middle grade schools, for example, strong arguments are made for restructuring the middle schools to provide more personalized attention and opportunities to develop critical thinking skills and self-worth, and for young adolescents to experience increased autonomy in decision-making. Some of the other recommendations are: create small learning environments, create youth service programs, connect school to community, promote cooperative learning and cross-age tutoring, and emphasize a healthy school environment.

Even though schools across the country are experiencing considerable financial, enrollment, and time problems, prevention activities can be extended, throughout the school environment through a variety of channels that are developed by the students, supervised and monitored by school personnel, and linked with the community. These nonclassroom strategies have high potential to prevent health compromising behaviors of youth, because they increase individual resiliency and protective factors, and they strengthen the non-use messages of the curriculum.

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